

“75 Years of Conservation: What’s Next?”

proud of you for having 45 foot tall trees lining your roads and fields now, but what about the individuals who invested time and money into planting and caring for them so many years ago? The Rifled Lake Project wouldn’t have stood a chance without the efforts of Game, Fish and Parks officials who protected and replaced trees, and cultivated the land for three years. We need to appreciate those who saw the opportunity for repairing our broken and destroyed agricultural system of the 1930’s, and made a difference.

Now before we let our egos get the better of us, it’s time to take a glance at reality. Although we are still seeing much progress, our arrogance is steering us straight back to where we came from. For example, people are continuing to bring in their own firewood, while we fight the Emerald Ash Bore, and while South Dakota’s Forestry Department declares a full scale war against mountain pine beetles, which have infested ponderosa pine trees on over 400,000 acres of Black Hills National Forest. Farmers are also choosing to put down record amounts of fertilizer in order to produce bin busting crops and CRP acres are dropping 11 percent every other year. This problem is manifesting itself right before our eyes once again. Conservation can’t just be tossed behind us in hopes that the increases of now will continue, because they won’t. In Dr. Seuss’ book, *The Lorax*, the Onceler becomes so preoccupied with how well his Thneeds are selling, that he ignores the side effects that are impacting the environment and animals living among him. Soon, all of the Truffula Trees have been destroyed and the land becomes uninhabitable. We don’t need a rhyme to see that we are heading towards the same fate. Whether it be by planting as much as possible without taking the time to care for the land through something as simple as crop rotation, or by building further and further into wildlife habitats because the housing settlement just can’t be without a golf

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course, we have become a society that is fixated on nothing but materialistic now.

However, if we pursue this by destroying the lives of animals and depleting the land for generations to come, are we really winning?

So, let's raise the disc, turn around, and reverse our already growing issue. As funding decreases significantly, the conservation districts must work to do more with less. Therefore, give the officials your gratitude, and then get to work and help them out! We can help with funding by contacting our legislature and advocating a penny tax on rural water systems. These districts do so much, from planting shelter belts, to providing weed control. We owe them our assistance. You don't need to be a farmer in order to guard this precious land. Saving water by taking shorter showers, using safe, chemical free pesticides, and keeping fertilizers away from any creeks or ponds are all changes that will have huge impacts. We can't just rely on what has happened already, but how we can make this progress stronger. By continuing to monitor what we do, we will maintain our uphill climb towards more effective conservation and protection.

When I was young, I didn't really know why we had miles of trees to run through or why my dad alternated between corn, wheat, and beans every year. As I've grown up, though, I've learned to understand and really appreciate how we do the things we do, because you never know when it could be gone. Now that we've seen how important conservation is and what we must do to preserve it, let's throw out the excuses and start anew. After 75 years of conservation: What's next? Well, these acres of rolling plains could quickly turn into a Country Club, complete with a swimming pool and waterslide, but as long as I'm around, South Dakota's agriculture and conservation are going to go nowhere but up.